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INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 002151

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGGERFO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/26/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [KDEM](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: DIVERGENT REACTIONS TO ABU MAZEN'S NATIONAL  
DIALOGUE REFERENDUM

REF: JERUSALEM 02135

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Hamas has yet to articulate a consistent position on Abu Mazen's intention to hold a national referendum proposal. Fatah officials have noted the discrepancy in statements from Hamas, a division which they hope to exploit in the coming 10-day discussion period. Meanwhile, the National Dialogue discussions continued on May 26. The Chief Electoral Officer of the Central Elections Commission (CEC) held a private meeting May 26 with Abu Mazen to discuss modalities for holding a national referendum. End summary.

Contradictory Hamas Reactions  
To Possible Referendum

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¶2. (C) Hamas officials in the West Bank and Gaza have expressed divergent reactions to the May 25 speech by Abu Mazen, in which the Palestinian president announced his intention to proceed with a national referendum unless the factions reach consensus on the basis of the prisoners' initiative (reftel). While most other factions -- including the PFLP, DFLP, the Third Way, and Palestinian People's Party -- have supported Abu Mazen's call for a referendum, Hamas' officials have publicly presented contradictory views. (Note: The noted exception is Khaled al-Batsh, a senior PIJ political activist from Gaza, who said that his movement categorically rejected the idea of holding a referendum. End note.)

¶3. (C) Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri described the referendum as a backhanded attempt to preempt the outcome of the National Dialogue. Abu Zuhri added that the prisoners' initiative represented one of several proposals that require further consideration. A statement published by Hamas on its official website characterized the call for a referendum as an effort to pressure the movement and pre-empt any further discussion during the National Dialogue.

¶4. (C) In contrast, several high-level Hamas officials put a more positive spin on the referendum. PM Isma'il Haniyyah stated that his government does not oppose the prisoners' initiative but the issue would require further discussion. PLC Speaker Aziz Dweik similarly praised the initiative, adding that he did not oppose going to a national referendum. PA Finance Minister Omar 'Abd al-Raziq, however, predicted that there would be no need for a referendum since all factions would reach consensus on the initiative.

Fatah Sees Fractured  
Hamas, And Opportunity

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15. (C) Contacts in Abu Mazen's office took note of the conflicting statements emanating from Hamas and concluded that the varied reactions reflected that Hamas was taken by surprise by Abu Mazen's speech. They reiterated their expectation that the Palestinian public would overwhelmingly support a referendum, citing a Fatah-initiated poll that indicated strong support in favor of the prisoners' initiative.

Clock Ticking On Referendum  
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16. (C) Delegates to the National Dialogue reconvened May 26 to continue discussions. The plenary meetings are scheduled to wrap up on the evening of May 26, and work will continue over the next 10 days in a committee with representatives from the main factions.

Abu Mazen Discusses  
Referendum With CEC  
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17. (C) During a May 26 telecon with ConGen Poloff, Ammar Dweik, the Chief Electoral Officer for the Central Elections Commission (CEC) reported that he had been summoned to Abu Mazen's office to discuss the modalities for holding a national referendum. Dweik informed Abu Mazen that there is no existing legal framework either in the Basic Law or in Election Law to hold a national referendum. Dweik thought that Abu Mazen might opt to issue a presidential decree authorizing the referendum. Dweik said that the CEC would need between 45 to 60 days to prepare. (Comment: This is 5 to 20 days longer than Abu Mazen's 40-day time-frame. End

comment.)

WALLES